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ABSTRACT

Organizations and groups responsible for the bulk of the nation's adult basic skills provision are currently reaching an estimated 9-10 percent of the needy population. This represents an increase from the 7-8 percent reached in 1984. Adult Basic Education (ABE), the largest single program in the nation, has shown an overall growth in enrollment of 25 percent in just 2 years (1984-1986). The greatest growth has been in service to English as a second language students; four states--California, Florida, Texas, and New York--account for 50 percent of the total ABE enrollment. More than one-third of enrollees drop out of ABE before finishing their program. The two major voluntary organizations, Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) and Laubach Literacy Action (LLA) have experienced dramatic growth in their service since 1984. Both have faced a heavy new demand for technical assistance and have received more, but still inadequate, funding. The other provider groups are collectively serving an increased number of persons, particularly library-based programs and community-based organizations. Various officials of these groups indicate that the television awareness campaigns and other national activities have greatly heightened interest in the special needs of their constituencies. Primary problems facing the field are a mood of pessimism, inadequate funding, inadequate planning to meet long-term needs, and slow federal and state policy development. (YLB)

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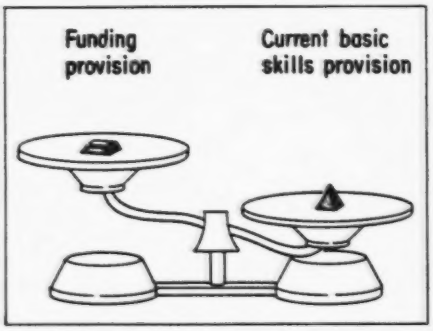
BCEL BUSINESS COUNCIL FOR EFFECTIVE LITERACY

ADULT LITERACY: PROGRAMS • PLANNING • ISSUES A Newsletter For The Business Community

NO. 14 JANUARY 1988

SERVICE PROVISION: Recent Gains, Current Problems



In 1984, the organizations and groups responsible for the bulk of the nation's adult basic skills provision were reaching an estimated 7-8 percent of the adults in need of basic skills help. National program enrollments have since increased–largely in response to the new demand generated by the national television awareness campaigns of PLUS and the Coalition for Literacy. All providers combined may now be reaching an estimated 9-10 percent of the needy population. Where have the increases occurred? What do they mean? And what problems loom large as we move into 1988?

The Federal ABE Program

ABE, the largest single program in the nation, enrolled 3.1 million persons in 1986, up from 2.5 million in 1984. This represents an overall growth of 25 percent in just two years. Recent material from the U.S. Department of Education revealed a number of interesting patterns:

- Some 950,000 of ABE students in 1986 were enrolled in basic skills programs, 1.3 million were in ESL programs, and 860,000 were in high-school-equivalency and diploma programs. While there has been growth in all three categories, the greatest increase has been in service to ESL students, resulting in lower increases for the other two categories of students for lack of program space and resources.
- Four states account for some 65 percent of the total ABE enrollment–California, Flor-

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ida, Texas, and New York. California and Florida alone account for 50 percent.

• Women and men are now enrolled about equally in ABE programs, which reflects a relatively large increase in male participation compared to past years.

• Persons aged 16-24 accounted for 40 percent of all 1986 enrollments, 25-44 for 40 percent, 45-59 for 12 percent, and 60+ for 8 percent. Persons under age 25 account for the largest part of the growth, resulting in diminished access for older persons.

• More than one-third of enrollees drop out of ABE before finishing their program years. Family problems, lack of interest, transportation problems and lack of child care assistance are among the reasons cited.

• By race/ethnicity, the percentages enrolled in ABE/ESL programs in 1986 were: Whites (37), Hispanics (31), Blacks (16), Asians (15), and American Indians (.8). Note that Blacks made up 25 percent of the total ABE population in 1984, and Hispanics 20 percent.

• For those in 1986 for whom employment data were available at the time of this writing (1.7 million), 40 percent were employed, 44 percent were unemployed but looking for work, and 16 percent were on public welfare.

Annual federal/state/local spending for ABE was approximately $300 million in 1984. It grew to $396 million in 1985 and $409 million in 1986. It is worthy of note that:

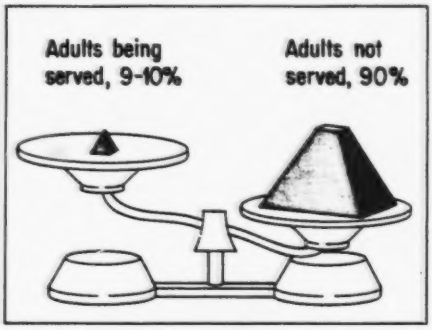
• In recent years the federal contribution to ABE has held at roughly $100 million per year, while state and local contributions have grown substantially. State/local funding of ABE in 1985 was $296 million, a growth of nearly 50 percent over 1984. In 1986, total state and local outlays were $309 million. (But more than half of all state and local funding comes from New York, Florida, Texas, and California, with California alone accounting for more than one-third. The majority of states provide relatively little for ABE activities.)

• Total ABE spending in 1984 amounted to a per student expenditure of $120. The comparative expenditure for 1986 was $132.

• Despite recent increases in funding, total outlays for ABE over the life of the program have not kept pace with inflation.

In 1986, the total number of ABE administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals (e.g. bookkeepers, typists, aides) nationally was 113,522. As the following data show, there is extremely heavy reliance on part-time personnel and volunteers in every category. **Fewer than 10 percent of the ABE teaching pool are full-time.**

	FT	PT	Vol
	(Paid)		
State-level adm/supv	222	58	33
Local adm/supv	2,389	3,546	1,185
Teachers	7,143	54,623	20,284
Local counselors	841	2,190	312
Local paraprofessionals	1,340	4,334	15,052
Totals	11,935	64,751	36,836



The Voluntary Organizations

The two major voluntary organizations, Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) and Laubach Literacy Action (LLA), maintain national offices to provide leadership and technical assistance to their memberships and to the field at large. Both have state and local affiliates which provide administrative and instructional services at those levels. Both have a long history of literacy service to the nation. And both have experienced dramatic growth in their service since 1984.

In 1984, LVA was serving 13,000 students with 10,000 tutors in 168 affiliate programs in 31 states. By mid-1987, according to LVA President Jinx Crouch, 30,000 students were being taught by 27,000 volunteers in 250 affiliate programs in 35 states. (During the last six months of 1987, 35 more affiliate operations were established.) It is interesting to note that in 1984 LVA affiliates also had 1,000 volunteers serving in various non-tutoring capacities; by mid-1987 this pool had grown to 4,000. LLA, in 1984, had some 500 affiliate programs in which 30,000 volunteers were tutoring some 42,000 adults in 42 states. According to Executive Director Peter Waite, in 1987 LLA had 750 affiliate programs in which 100,000 adults were being tutored by 68,000 volunteer tutors in 45 states. Volunteers in non-tutoring roles numbered 4,300 in 1984 and by 1987 had grown to 9,900.

LVA and LLA have both experienced a heavy new demand for technical assistance (e.g. providing guidance and tutor training to their affiliates and, increasingly, to ABE, businesses, and other non-affiliate groups wishing to expand or set up programs). Peter Waite reports that requests to LLA to train tutors has increased as much as 500 percent since 1984. LVA has had to set up a cadre of trained volunteers to travel the country providing technical assistance.

While funding for the LLA and LVA networks has grown, it has been inadequate compared to the rate at which services have expanded. LVA's national budget grew from $600,000 in 1984 to $1 million in 1987. Despite an aggressive fundraising campaign, most of LVA's budget increase is due to heavier sale of publications (some 65 percent of LVA's total income) and one-time grants designated for special projects rather than general operating support. Though there are a greater number of programs today, individual budget levels are roughly at the same level as in 1984. The vast majority of local LVA affiliate programs still have annual budgets below $10,000, with many as low as $1,500. About 11 percent have budgets of $10-20,000. The 1987 budgets of the state-level LVA affiliates (there are ten) range between $30,000 to $300,000, and sustaining these levels is proving more and more difficult.

LLA fares somewhat better than LVA. Laubach's national-level budget grew from $1.9 million in 1984 to $5.5 million in 1987. As with LVA, 65 percent of LLA's national income came from publications sales and one-time grants for special projects. The budgets of local LLA programs are for the most part less than $5,000 a year, while state offices (there are 17) have budgets ranging from $500 to, in one case, $700,000.

The Other Provider Groups

The programs of correctional institutions, community-based organizations, colleges, libraries, churches, refugee and immigrant agencies, and the business community provide a substantial portion of the nation's adult literacy services. In terms of its importance, each deserves its own subheading in this article. But, unfortunately, there is no reliable information available on the numbers of adults served by these groups or on their budget levels in either 1984 or at present. The

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best that can be said is that in 1984 they were collectively serving perhaps 3 million persons, and anecdotal evidence indicates that service provision has since increased somewhat for most of these groups, especially library-based programs and community-based organizations.*

Additional monies have gone to some of these provider groups, especially job training programs, community-based organizations, and library literacy programs, but, again, there are no reliable figures available on the patterns and overall levels of funding. (One exception is the $5 million in new funding that has been made available annually to libraries since 1986 through the new Title VI of the Library Services and Construction Act.)

Officials of the various networks of provision do indicate that the television awareness campaigns and other national activities have greatly heightened interest in the special needs of their constituencies, with increased attention being given to making national and state legislation more responsive to these needs. Moreover, the national leadership organizations for each component of provision are pursuing an active agenda to encourage and support program development at the local and state levels.

Facing Up To The Problems

It is sobering to see that for all the gains, we are still at the tip of the pyramid in both services and funding. The harsh reality is that it costs more to provide services these days and the recent growth in funding has been far from adequate. Moreover, hundreds of thousands of students and potential tutors have been put on waiting lists or turned away for lack of resources to serve them. To a very great extent the providers have been able to manage by "running harder and faster."

Among the priority problems facing the field at this point are the following:

- *A mood of pessimism is setting in among the providers as they ask how much more they can do without a major infusion of new funding. Many programs and personnel feel that they are dangerously close to burn-out, especially the voluntary groups.*

- *The new funding provided to the field in the past few years, while important, is only a scant beginning given the scale of the illiteracy problem. Some 90 percent of the adults in need of basic skills help are not yet being reached.*

- *No one has yet faced the need to address the really important long-term needs, prime among them the following: It is commonly recognized that a far higher degree of professionalism must be brought to the field if instruction is to be effective and to have lasting value. This will take a massive effort to train more qualified teachers and pay them, develop more paid supervisory and management personnel, develop more useful assessment and diagnostic tools, and provide incentives to give full professional stature to the field itself. In his monograph for BCEL in 1985, David Harman estimated that a comprehensive long-term quality effort in these related areas would cost the nation billions of dollars–this to effectively serve about 15 million adult learners. Yet, despite cautionary advice from the experts, reliance on volunteers as a solution continues to grow, even in the ABE program.*

- *We are in a Catch 22 situation on the funding and policy development fronts. Programs need major new resources now, but state and federal policy development to support that is proceeding very slowly. Moreover, state and local groups providing the service and planning are being called upon to institutionalize their gains, become more accountable, and take a more active hand in policy development. The trouble is that they are already bursting at the seams to meet their current day-to-day responsibilities. It is not clear at present how the needed state-level policy development will get done or by whom, or where the capacity to improve program management and accountability will come from. Neither is it clear how the research needed to support the policy process will get done.*

- *Relatedly, the entire national effort is just as hampered today as it was in 1984 by the haphazard and fragmented manner in which information about programs, enrollments, funding, and other such important variables is collected. Not only is there no central source attending to this need, but most components of the providing system do not themselves have the capacity to collect such information or to collect it in a useful way.* ■

*Note that even the best estimates of enrollment in any component of the adult literacy system are shaky. There is currently no way to adjust for double counting that occurs because students are often enrolled in programs under multiple sponsorship. Moreover, all students are counted the same even though program participation varies from a few hours to a few weeks to a full year.